

A Wild Flower Pilgrimage

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The early spring flowers of the desert and semi-desert regions of southern California make a remarkable display. Equally remarkable is the interest they arouse in the residents of the region. From the middle of March to the middle of April thousands of people make auto trips of from one hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty miles just to see the flowers. This spring on several consecutive Sundays as many as five thousand cars were estimated to have gone over the Ridge Route from Los Angeles and Pasadena to the San Joaquin Valley to see the lupines. It is certainly no exaggeration to say that one hundred thousand people came from various directions during the three weeks that the flowers were at their best. For some weeks previously the newspapers carried articles as to the outlook for a good show of flowers and directions as to where and when to go. The Automobile Association of Southern California did much to arouse interest. Filling stations on the roads to the valley hung out signs "Wild Flower Information" and sometimes had bunches of the different flowers in bottles to show what could be looked for. In some stations the flowers were named, in others the proprietors had but the haziest idea as to what the flowers were, but all could direct autoists to the best fields of bloom.

When we stopped at a little plateau on the Grapevine, the last section of the Ridge Route as it leads down into the valley, we looked out over an inspiring sight. Possibly five hundred feet below and a mile away was a lake of brilliant blue and violet extending along the base of the mountain in a belt of from half a mile to over a mile wide. Scores of other cars were parked by us with hundreds of people enjoying the sight. Descending to the valley floor we found the ground so thickly carpeted with lupines, mostly *Lupinus nanus*, that one could not step among them without crushing some flowers. The dense covering of blue stretched for miles in both directions. Close at hand other flowers could be found with the lupines. A yellow evening primrose, *Oenothera dentata campestris*, only four or five inches high, formed a stratum below the taller lupines. Blue and white flowers of a gilia, *Gilia tricolor*, pink heads of owl clover, *Orthocarpus purpurascens*, and dainty cream cups, *Platystemon californicus*, were abundant but largely hidden by the taller plants. Blue dicks, *Brodiaea capitata*, with a cluster of purple-blue flowers on a slender stalk, were scat-

tered through the fields. As we traveled further out into the valley the lupines became less numerous and the fields took on a yellow tinge from the primroses. Still further the lupines and yellow evening primroses were left behind and the ground was flecked with patches of white or pale pink from a large flowered *Oenothera*, *O. caespitosa*, the flowers two to two and a half inches in diameter, spread flat on the ground. With it there were a few wiry grasses and dwarfed plants of crane's bill, *Erodium cicutarium*, probably the commonest weed in this part of the state. These plants did not cover the ground completely, but let the soil show between everywhere. As we drove along somewhat parallel to the base of the mountains we found an area dominated by a peculiar plant that strongly resembled a very woolly thistle. From a rosette of white, spiny-toothed leaves grew a stem a foot to a foot and a half high, bearing from two to four globular flower clusters each surrounded by a circle of spiny bracts. The two-lipped flowers were violet or light blue, an inch long, with the lower lip delicately fringed. The odor of sage at once suggested the common name—thistle sage—which in the scientific form becomes *Salvia carduacea*. Further along the lupines became abundant again but with them were two composites of the Cichoriaceae with attractive large flower heads. One of these, *Mala-cothrix californica*, frequently grew in such quantities as to form large yellow blotches in the sea of blue.

All the flowers mentioned, except the *Brodiaea*, which grows from bulbs, are annuals. If there are sufficient rains in January and February they develop and cover the ground with the dense carpet of blue, violet, yellow or pink as we had seen it. In a few weeks seeds mature, the plants die and the region is a desert until the following spring. If rainfall has been scanty, but few plants develop and they flower and set seed when only a few inches high.

In the notices in the papers it had been suggested that flowers should be picked in moderation. Most of the people we met had picked flowers, but none had large bunches, and though the total number picked must have run into hundreds of thousands on a single Sunday, no thinning of the masses was noticeable.

A few weeks later in other regions there were equally beautiful displays of California poppies that other thousands from the cities visited. It is inspiring to find such interest in and love for the flowers and note that the idea of conservation has such a strong hold on the people.